UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/846/Part IV/4
24 July 1995

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Forty-sixth session

UNHCR ACTIVITIES FINANCED BY VOLUNTARY FUNDS: REPORT FOR 1994-1995 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMMES AND BUDGET FOR 1996

PART IV. THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN

Section 4 - United States of America

(submitted by the High Commissioner)

GE.85-02385

IV.4 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

1. Beneficiary population

1. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) processes asylum applications to the United States, with appeal cases adjudicated by immigration judges, part of the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) at the Department of Justice. Comparative statistics are as follows:

	1992(*)	1993(*)	1994(*)
Cases filed (INS)	104,000	144,200	147,600
Cases filed (EOIR)	13,000	15,300	18,200
Cases approved (INS)	3,900	5,000	8,300
Cases approved (EOIR)	1,800	1,700	1,700

(*) Fiscal year (FY) covering the period 1 October to 30 September.

2. During Fiscal Year 1994, almost 113,000 refugees were resettled in the US. Furthermore, the number of persons under temporary protection was estimated to be some 98,000 at the end of 1994.

3. Due to political developments in Haiti and Cuba during the second half of 1994, several tens of thousands of asylum-seekers from both countries attempted to reach the US by boat. Most were intercepted at sea by passing vessels -- predominantly the US Coast Guard -- and taken to safe havens in countries in the Caribbean basin according to a previous agreement reached between the US and the countries concerned. Although physically situated in a variety of Caribbean nations, they were considered a "United States" caseload, in view of their very obvious goal to reach the US. At the end of 1994 statistics covering the countries hosting these two caseloads were as follows:

	Cubans	Haitians	
Bahamas	-	40,000	(estimate)
Cayman Islands	1,200	-	
Dom. Republic	30	732	
Costa Rica	418	12	
Guantanamo Bay Naval Base (US)	29,824	4,915	(down from 21,049 earlier in the month)
Mexico	39	48	
Panama		11	
Turks & Caicos Islands	-	4,500	(estimate)
Venezuela	27	56	

2. Developments in 1994 and 1995

4. Although there have been no major changes in operational projects or plans in the last quarter of 1994 and the first half of 1995, a number of political considerations have focused UNHCR's attention and activities:

(a) Haiti

5. The US-led intervention resulting in the return of President Aristide to Haiti in October 1994 encouraged approximately 16,000 Haitians benefiting from temporary safe haven at the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba to return home voluntarily. At the end of December 1994 the US offered an "enhanced benefits package" to the remaining 4,000 asylum-seekers to encourage their voluntary return, an offer which few accepted. The US then screened those remaining to determine who would be allowed to stay at Guantanamo, using a newly-created standard, and repatriated the rest. At the end of April 1995, fewer than 500 Haitians remained at Guantanamo, most of them unaccompanied minors awaiting a best interests durable solution to be determined by UNHCR, with the cooperation of the US Government, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Save the Children Fund. The US Government supported these efforts financially by providing UNHCR with an allocation of $ 701,509 for the second semester of 1994 which was partially implemented in Guantanamo by the non-governmental organization World Relief and partially used to cover UNHCR administrative expenditure. Since January 1995 the activities benefiting the residual Haitian Guantanamo caseload have been carried out directly by UNHCR under a Trust Fund project of $ 817,500, due to end by 30 June 1995. UNHCR has also urged the US to find a durable solution for those screened in for continued safe haven, as well as other Haitians for whom there is a protection need.

(b) Cuba

6. Some 30,000 Cubans fled their country in August and September 1994 and found safe haven in countries around the Caribbean. Over 2,000 Cubans who landed in the Cayman Islands were processed under refugee determination procedures and the majority were screened out. In the absence of a durable solution in the country of asylum, small groups of them took once again to the seas and landed in Central American countries such as Belize, Costa Rica and Mexico, where they were either given asylum or, in the case of Belize, were repatriated against their will in April 1995. Most of the remaining families in the Cayman Islands opted to go to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base where they were eventually granted humanitarian parole into the US. UNHCR provided advice to the Cayman Island authorities during the screening process and offered additional training and counselling for subsequent appeals.

(c) Other developments

7. Immigration remains an important issue in the new Republican-controlled Congress. A bill has been introduced which, inter alia, would provide for expedited exclusion procedures and limit the number of resettlement places to 50,000, representing a reduction of more than 50 per cent on current admission

levels. A major development in 1994 was the redrafting of the US Government's resettlement priorities to specifically incorporate UNHCR referrals of vulnerable cases, security cases and persons for whom no other durable solution is feasible. This change should enable UNHCR to refer a larger number of refugees to the resettlement programme. Since the adoption of the new procedures, there has been an ongoing dialogue to clarify and elaborate this new working relationship between UNHCR and the United States.

8. Related to the change in priorities has been an effort to expand the number of countries where the United States conducts resettlement processing. Discussions have been ongoing between the US authorities and UNHCR to choose suitable locations to undertake resettlement processing, procedures for referral to the US and the scheduling of US selection missions. By an informal mutual agreement, Africa and the Middle East have been the initial regions of focus. The first processing was conducted in Ethiopia in December 1994. In February 1995 the US resettled out of Burundi for the first time, following a UNHCR request. US selection missions also went to Zambia that same month. Further missions are scheduled for Benin, Nigeria and Jordan, and possibly later on to the Syrian Arab Republic, Ghana, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic, Botswana, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The issue of US processing of Iraqis in Saudi Arabia, the largest single group of refugees for whom UNHCR is seeking resettlement, continues to pose problems. To date, the US has taken about half of all those resettled from Saudi Arabia but pressure has been exerted by some quarters to reduce or eliminate the programme. UNHCR will continue to work closely with NGOs and the State Department to maintain support for it.

9. To assist the UNHCR Branch Office in Washington, DC, in explaining and interpreting the workings of UNHCR to the new Congress and the Executive Branch, and to encourage continued US political and financial leadership on behalf of refugees, a number of visits of senior UNHCR officials have been made -- and will continue throughout 1995 -- to Washington. Visitors meet with the Department of State, particularly the Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration, the Agency for International Development, the Department of Defense, the National Security Council and members of Congress and their staffs. In the spirit of UNHCR-NGO Partnership in Action (PARinAC) visitors also usually meet with NGOs involved in human rights, refugee and disaster assistance, and relief and development.

3. 1996 country programmes

(a) Objectives

10. The Branch Office in Washington, DC, will continue in 1996 to build upon activities and initiatives started in previous years. These can be broadly grouped under four headings: protection, local settlement/resettlement, external relations including PARinAC, and training and promotional activities.

(i) Protection

11. The Branch Office will continue to work with US authorities in establishing fair, effective and expedient screening procedures through legislative or

administrative reforms. UNHCR will continue to provide technical advice on draft legislation bills to amend the US Asylum Act. UNHCR will likewise continue to work with US attorneys in filing gender-related claims on behalf of women seeking asylum, particularly in the context of the new US Federal Court decisions citing persecution on the basis of gender as a ground for asylum.

(ii) Local settlement/resettlement

12. In addition to continuing the ongoing discussions on locations for resettlement processing of substantial numbers of refugees, individual cases will also continue to be given careful appraisal and support for resettlement in the US whenever their situation so merits. The resettlement project will continue to receive a high volume of referrals for assistance from various quarters, and to try to limit its individual casework to those refugees for whom UNHCR assistance is the only alternative to bring about their resettlement. Special attention will be given to resettlement of vulnerable cases, especially women and individuals whose lives are endangered. The Branch Office will continue to work with voluntary agencies and attorneys nationwide on the filing of waiver requests for refugees who test HIV-positive and, ultimately, on eliminating the need for the waiver process altogether.

(iii) External relations

13. Efforts will continue in 1996 to develop contacts in the Executive and Legislative branches, as well as NGOs, media, foundations and academic institutions, and to coordinate improvements to the Branch Office's computerized databases for asylum and refugee issues.

14. Increasing efforts will be made by the US for UNHCR to recruit prominent Americans to the Executive and Advisory Boards of the organization and to utilize their influence and contacts to build and strengthen public, congressional and executive branch political and financial support for UNHCR activities around the world.

(iv) Training and promotional activities

15. As in 1995, the Branch Office will continue to strengthen its partnership with NGOs through a number of promotional activities, such as round-table discussions, seminars and workshops. The Branch Office will schedule regional PARinAC meetings in the western states at least twice a year, given the large number of potential supporters, refugee communities and asylum applicants there.

16. The southern border states will also be visited more regularly, particularly given the concentration of Republican Congressional leadership from the area. These meetings will be scheduled to the extent possible with legal and resettlement training fora and possibly in conjunction with guest lectures or major conferences. Lunch seminars on programme and protection issues with government, NGO and academic participants, a successful and cost-effective way of disseminating information on UNHCR activities, will continue to be scheduled regularly.

(b) Proposed budgets for 1996

17. The local settlement project under General Programmes will continue with the same activities and staff as in 1994 and 1995, although a slight increase of 12 per cent in the budget is anticipated to cover higher salaries of agency staff, in line with federal pay levels, and a higher office rent.

(c) Implementing partners

18. Church World Services will continue to implement the local settlement project in 1996. Two legal counsellors, two resettlement counsellors and two support staff carry out legal and resettlement counselling and assist in identifying suitable refugee support groups willing to sponsor refugees seeking resettlement in the US. The NGO USA for UNHCR will implement the project covering promotional and fund raising activities on behalf of UNHCR in the private sector.

(d) Programme Delivery and Administrative Support Costs

19. Variations due to changes in budget parameters are not discussed in the subsequent analysis (Overview of UNHCR Activities, Part I(A/AC.96/845) refers).

(i) 1994 expenditure (all sources of funds)

20. The 1994 expenditure was lower than the revised estimates. This was due to expenditure on the Haiti operation, staff travel, office rent and communications being less than foreseen.

(ii) Revised 1995 requirements (all sources of funds)

21. The revised 1995 requirements are not significantly different from initial estimates.

(iii) Initial 1996 requirements (all sources of funds)

22. The 1996 requirements are proposed at approximately the same level as revised 1995.

UNHCR EXPENDITURE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

(in thousands of United States dollars)

1994	1995		1996	
AMOUNT OBLIGATED	ALLOCATION APPROVED BY 1994 EXCOM	PROPOSED REVISED ALLOCATION	SOURCE OF FUNDS AND TYPE OF ASSISTANCE	PROPOSED ALLOCATION/ PROJECTION
GENERAL PROGRAMMES (1)				
38.1 a/	–	–	VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION	–
341.2 b/	367.1	425.1	LOCAL SETTLEMENT	483.6
1,363.1	1,930.5	1,929.6	PROGRAMME DELIVERY See Overview Tables (Part II)	1,928.3
1,742.4	**2,297.6**	**2,354.7**	**SUB–TOTAL OPERATIONS**	**2,411.9**
353.0	431.4	215.0	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT See Overview Tables (Part II)	215.4
2,095.4	**2,729.0**	**2,569.7**	**T O T A L (1)**	**2,627.3**
SPECIAL PROGRAMMES (2)				
139.4	–	–	OTHER TRUST FUNDS	–
149.8	–	44.5	PROGRAMME DELIVERY See Overview Tables (Part II)	–
289.2	**0.0**	**44.5**	**T O T A L (2)**	**0.0**
2,384.6	**2,729.0**	**2,614.2**	**GRAND TOTAL (1+2)**	**2,627.3**

a/ obligation incurred against Other Programmes
b/ of which US$ 997 incurred against Other Programmes